

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

www.retiredamericans.org

Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

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Omnibus Spending Bill Provides Additional \$480 Million for Social Security Administration

The U.S. House passed a massive \$1.3 trillion spending bill on Thursday to fund the federal government through September 30. The Senate followed early Friday, and President **Trump** signed the measure on Friday afternoon.

The Omnibus provides \$12.8 billion for the Social Security Administration's (SSA) administrative budget - a \$480 million increase over last year. That includes an increase for general operations, as well as designated amounts of \$284 million for Information Technology modernization and \$100 million for reducing the disability hearings backlog.

Unlike the administration's FY 2018 budget, which decimated Community Development Block Grants, the Omnibus provides about \$3.4 billion for grants which help fund things like senior nutrition assistance, including Meals on Wheels.

"The omnibus is a step in the right direction," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "While it still does not provide sufficient funding to pay for all of SSA's fixed costs, it increases non-defense discretionary spending to cover important programs under the Older Americans Act. This includes help for low-income seniors to pay their home energy bills and funding to provide job training for unemployed, low-income older Americans."

This marks the first time in eight years that Social Security's operating budget for core administrative activities has been increased after adjusting for inflation. It comes just 6 months after Senate Republicans passed a bill in the Appropriations Committee that would have cut the SSA budget by \$492 million.

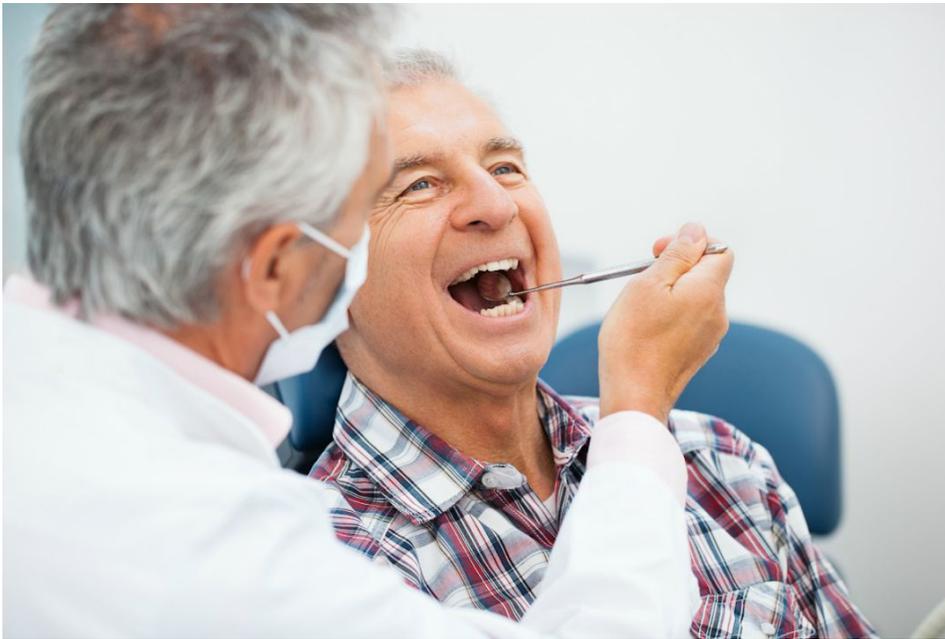
The report accompanying the bill includes language to address staff shortages and increased wait times in both field offices and on the national 800 number. It directs SSA to submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate within 90 days outlining its plan for ensuring that field offices, hearing offices, processing centers, and teleservice centers are receiving sufficient resources to maintain at least the current level of services.

The agreement further directs that while SSA's Inspector General (IG) is reviewing decisions to close field offices, the Acting SSA Commissioner is not to make any final decisions related to field office locations under review.

Despite the Omnibus, House Speaker **Paul Ryan** [doubled down on cutting Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security](#), on Tuesday, saying Congress will “have to keep at it” on cutting so-called “entitlements.”

Medicare Does Not Cover Dental Care - Yet

Medicare has been a cornerstone in ensuring that older Americans are not driven into bankruptcy by medical bills. However, significant gaps in the program remain. One of those is [dental care](#), including checkups, cleanings, fillings, dentures and tooth extraction.



Almost one in five adults of Medicare eligibility age (65 years old and older) has untreated cavities. The same proportion have lost all their teeth. Half of Medicare beneficiaries have some periodontal disease, or infection of structures around teeth, including the gums. Bacteria from such infections can circulate elsewhere in the body, contributing to other health problems such as heart disease and strokes.

Paying for dental care out of pocket is hard for many Medicare beneficiaries, since half have annual incomes below \$23,000 per year.

Low-income Medicare beneficiaries can also qualify for Medicaid, but that's of little help for those living in states with gaps in Medicaid dental coverage.

According to a [study published in Health Affairs](#), in a given year, three-quarters of low-income Medicare beneficiaries do not receive any dental care at all. Among higher-income beneficiaries, the figure is about one-quarter. As a consequence of avoidable dental problems, the Medicare program bears the cost of expensive emergency department visits and avoidable hospitalizations.

A [Families USA survey](#) of likely voters found that 86% of likely voters support adding a dental benefit to Medicare. The survey also found that when people do not see a dentist, the top reason is cost. That cost could be offset — or partly offset — by reductions in other health care spending, since poor oral health contributes to other health problems.

“In 2003, the surgeon general called for dental care to be treated and covered like other health care needs,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The time has come to make that dream a reality.”

Labor Department Won't Protect Retirees' Financial Interests Following Court Decision

Federal regulators for now are [backing off](#) enforcement of an **Obama**-era rule intended to protect people saving for retirement. In general, the rule requires advisors and brokers to put their clients' interests before their own when advising on retirement accounts such as 401(k) plans and individual retirement accounts.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last week that the Labor Department overstepped its authority by creating the so-called fiduciary rule, parts of which went into effect in 2017. Those provisions included requiring advisors to provide advice that aligns with clients' best interests, charge reasonable compensation and not make misleading statements.

The Department of Labor officials' decision not to enforce the rule affects all advisors nationwide who have been subject to it, not just those who work in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana, where the appeals court has jurisdiction.

The remaining provisions, set to take effect on July 1, 2019 — the result of repeated delays after President Donald Trump took office — articulate what advisors must do to meet those requirements.

“The fiduciary rule would provide protection for retirees that otherwise does not exist,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “For instance, it would require those earning commissions on investments in retirement accounts to sign a legal agreement putting their clients' interests ahead of their own, as well as other disclosures related to fees, services and conflicts of interest.”

According to a 2015 study from former President **Barack Obama's** Council of Economic Advisors, conflicted advice was costing consumers about \$17 billion in retirement earnings each year. The legal battle is likely to continue.

New Video Highlights Illinois Alliance's Intergenerational Work



The Chicago Metro Chapter of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans, including Corresponding Secretary **Bea Lumpkin**, launched an intergenerational alliance with young activists in June 2017. Now they're working together to win the 2018 elections.

The chapter recently completed an inspiring documentary about the intergenerational retreat from their launch. Four school, labor and community-based youth organizations participated and formed an alliance with the state chapter focused on free tuition, the "Fight for 15" minimum wage amount, and saving and expanding Social Security and Medicare.

Thanks to the generosity of their donors, Chicago Metro Retirees can offer a free DVD of their documentary to any Alliance chapter or affiliate to show to members, youth groups, or local unions. The documentary runs 11 minutes and is professionally narrated by **Alma Washington**. Just send a request to illinoisara@gmail.com with your postal mailing address and position in the Alliance. The documentary is also available on [Youtube](#).

The Alliance for Retired Americans is a national organization that advocates for the rights and well-being of over 4.4 million retirees and their families.